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Congresswoman Jackie Speier Delivers GGU School of Law 2014 Commencement Address

Golden Gate University School of Law

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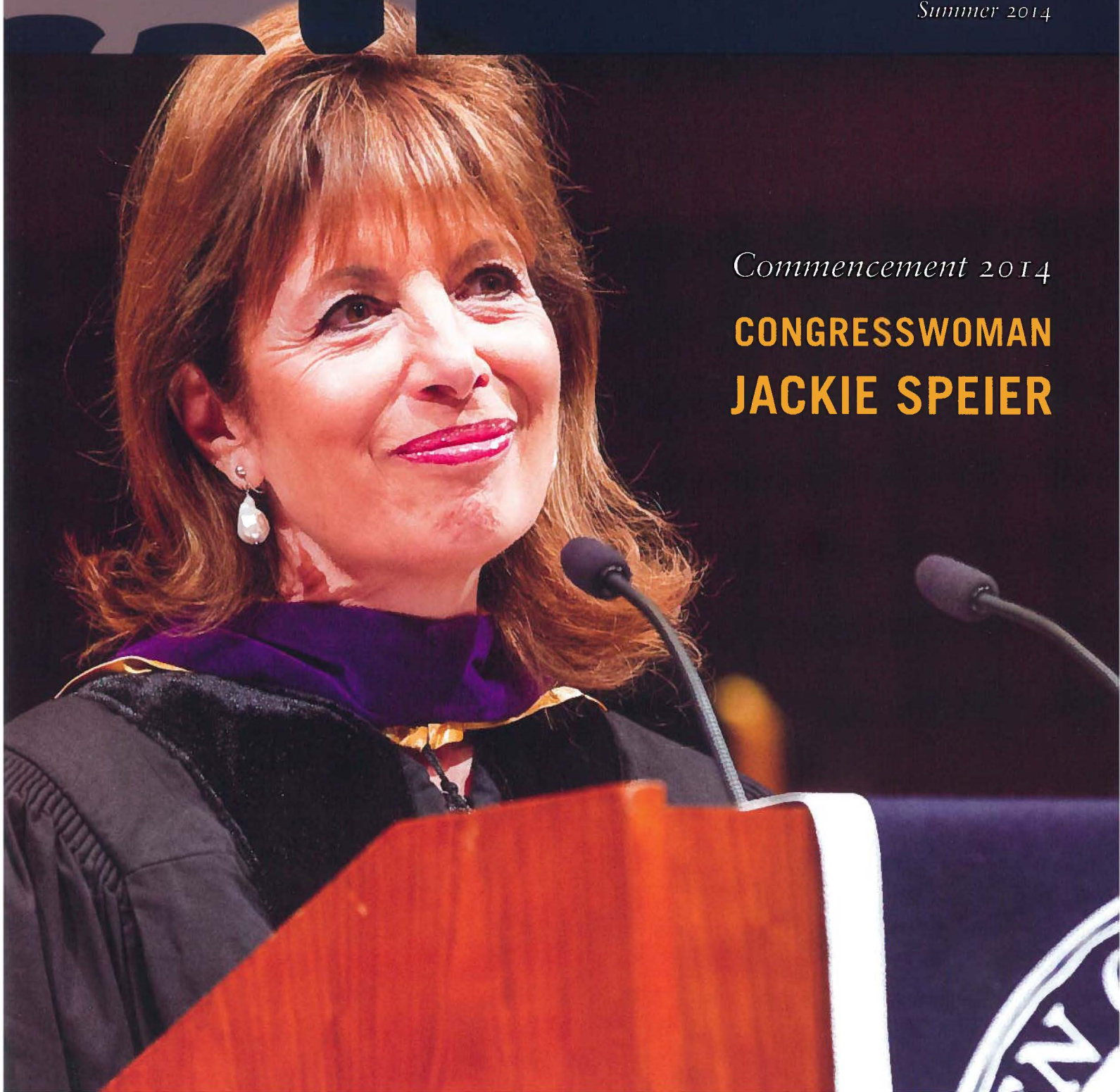
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Summer 2014

Commencement 2014

**CONGRESSWOMAN
JACKIE SPEIER**



Celebrating OUR GRADUATES



/// 2014 Commencement at Davies Symphony Hall

On Thursday, May 15, the graduating class of 2014, trustees, administration, faculty, staff, friends and family filled Davies Symphony Hall for the 2014 GGU Law Commencement Ceremony. It was a wonderful event honoring years of hard work and numerous accomplishments of our graduates.

Congresswoman Jackie Speier delivered the keynote address.



/// Congresswoman Jackie Speier

2014 Commencement

BY CONGRESSWOMAN JACKIE SPEIER

*Dean Van Cleave, President Angel,
Chairman Waldman, Trustees, Faculty,
family, and friends, Class of 2014...*

Let me start off by saying — I have no illusions that you will remember what I say here today. In fact, I don't remember who spoke at my law school commencement ceremony or what the message was. But I do come to you with a simple message: Be gritty.

I like that word...gritty.

It suggests our western values. There's a reason why people like us gravitate to the left coast. Sure we like the ocean breeze and the lack of hurricanes and superstorms.

We embraced the flower children and medical marijuana before the rest of the country did. And the Beach Boys created California Girls although most of us aren't blondes and wouldn't be caught dead in a bikini.

We're here because we BELIEVE in going where others wouldn't dare.

I love telling the story about two guys who 35 years ago sat at an outdoor table in front of Perry's here in San Francisco and BELIEVED they could start a revolution—a new industrial and scientific revolution. These guys were gritty.

They really didn't know each other very well. They drank a few beers and shook hands and by so doing, founded not just a new company but a new industry.

Of course, I'm talking about Herb Boyer and the late Bob Swanson — founders of Genentech. In South San Francisco alone, there are now 80 plus biotech and biomedical companies — in the Bay Area probably hundreds.

People with grit aren't afraid to tank.

Take Steve Jobs in his early 20's. Here's a guy who didn't do well in high school or college. In fact he dropped out after 6 months. By his early 20's he's failing by any ordinary standard because he's barely got a dollar to his name and he's hanging out with sketchy people, including a geeky programmer named Wozniak, tinkering in his parent's garage down the Peninsula.

But Jobs was gritty and he was determined to create something that hasn't been done before — a home computer. Not a multi-million dollar computer from IBM but something that everyone can have in their own house.

He asked questions like: What if the computer could do graphs and charts?

What if you could type on it?

What if you could play games?

What if the computer played music?

Celebrating OUR GRADUATES



/// Professor Michele Neitz, Dean Rachel Van Cleave



/// Sun Lee (LLM 14), Verleana Green (LLM 14)

Now it takes grit to create these computers. You have to imagine doing something a thousand times better because remember — the important uses for that computer hadn't even been invented yet, but Jobs had that grit because Jobs was obsessed.

He and Wozniak worked on it for ten years and went from the two of them in a garage to 4000 of them and a \$2 billion company. Then, Jobs was 30 and he got fired. Imagine — getting fired from the company you created!

So, my story is similar without the billion dollar ending. You are looking at a three time loser. This is what it looks like.

I lost my very first election — for student body president in high school. I was devastated, humiliated. I was a loser.

I got over it.

Next, I lost for Congress in 1979.

And I lost for Lt. Governor in 2006.

Here's what I know — success is never final and failure is never fatal!

I keep a paperweight on my desk — it's like my touchstone.

It asks a simple question: What would you do if you knew you could not fail?

I test it all the time — just last week I took a leap of faith.

A lot of people counseled me not to move forward on an amendment challenging why the military chain of command with no legal training should decide whether or not a serviceman accused of rape is actually tried.

I lost by three votes. It was the right thing to do because we established how strong our opposition to the status quo is. Failing always sets you up for winning.

So I tell you these stories because all of you have grit. We know that because you've survived law school. You're already a thousand times better off than you were when you began. You've done it once...you've made yourself a thousand times better. But now I ask you, "Are you really gritty? Can you make the world a thousand times better?"

Gritty people aren't afraid to ask that question. Part of being gritty is being willing to be DISRUPTIVE.

Some of you will become attorneys to clients like the next Genentech, Airbnb, or Uber. You'll be able to demonstrate your grit by being disruptive. Sometimes, if you're in the right place at the right time, that's a way to rapidly make the world a thousand times better.

One of the other disruptive persons in the room is going to ask you about the law. They'll ask you basic questions such as, "Is this legal? I know it'll make a lot of money, but is it legal?"

If you've got the right client and they are really gritty, with a deep character, they'll also ask you the question, "Is what we plan to do ethical?"

Hopefully, your moment to start being gritty will be at that conference table in a high rise or in a startup work-sleep loft. You'll be the attorney and if you're really in the presence of genius you'll be swept up by the dream.

You'll want to say "Yes" when asked if it's legal.

You'll want to say "Yes" if you are asked whether this bold vision is ethical.

But your duty as an attorney, and the way you'll really show your grit, is if you are capable of saying "No." You see, being gritty also includes the ability to say "No" when no is the toughest answer.

Much of the financial collapse in this country was caused by lawyers and financiers who thought they were making the world a thousand times better by making themselves a million times richer. Before the collapse, these bigwigs had fancy names like "London Whale" or the "Fabulous Fab." The press certainly made them seem gritty — all this money was going to make the world a thousand times better by bringing home ownership to those who never could afford to buy a home or make the company's return even greater.

Well, we know how that ended, don't we?

Imagine if someone had questioned the Fabulous Fab. Maybe Goldman Sachs wouldn't have contributed so heavily to the downturn along with Bear Stearns, AIG and Lehman Brothers. Maybe the millions of long-term unemployed in this country would still be at work instead of struggling.

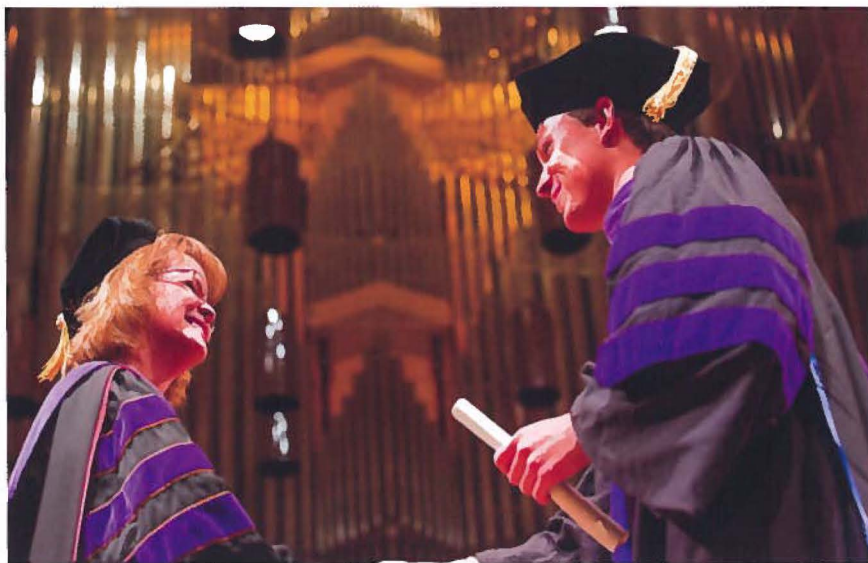
I've spent 30 years in public office and I've been moderately successful. But the truth is I could have been way more successful if I had taken my law degree and gone to court. Changes in this country come about today in at least three ways — through someone being disruptive in technology or someone changing a law or someone going to court and winning or losing a case.

Brown vs. Board of Education abolished separate but equal. *US vs. Windsor* recognized same sex marriage for federal purposes.

Celebrating OUR GRADUATES



/// 2014 graduates



/// Dean Rachel Van Cleave conferring degree



/// Class of 2014

Today I'm asking you to be gritty. Say "yes" when the chance to make the world a thousand times better is before you and it's legal. Say "yes" when it's ethical. Say "no" when it's not legal or when it simply isn't right.

I've been racing against time for 36 years. It's like a clock is about to strike midnight and my life will be coming to an end. Now that's a little melodramatic but let me say it another way. Don't waste a minute. Don't waste a minute on thankless friends or in boredom or in an unfulfilling job.

36 years ago, I thought I was dying on a remote airstrip in South America. My 28-year-old body was riddled with five bullets.

Back at Jonestown nearly 1000 people were dead or dying, most of them murdered.

Including infants in the arms of their parents.

Anyone who tells you that Jonestown was a mass suicide is either lying or simply ignorant. Infants don't commit suicide and people who have guns at their head aren't committing suicide.

On November 18th of 1978, I wasn't gritty. I was just trying to survive. 22 hours bleeding out. Drinking rum to kill the pain. The people who found me thought they were being nice to a dying woman. They moved me to the side of the airstrip, but be careful what you ask for. They put me on top of an anthill...But hey, I tell everyone when you're dying, you don't sweat the small stuff.

During all this time I'm thinking, I may not make it. I'll never get married. Never have those 2.5 kids. I'll never be able to see my grandmother again — a woman who was my inspiration.

Being a good Catholic I said the Act of Contrition and waited for the lights to go out. But as time went on and I didn't die, I also started to focus on what might happen if I survived. I vowed that if I got out of there alive, that I would dedicate every day to public service. I'd try to make this world a thousand times better. I'm still trying, and I'm not wasting a minute.

Now some of you haven't wasted a minute because you know what it's like to be literally under fire and counting those minutes. I think we should applaud those veterans who are graduating today.

Some of you formed The Veterans Law Student Association in the Spring of 2013. The association now has 48 student members. I particularly like the fact that the membership involves veterans as well as non-veteran supporters because the issues that plague those who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan involve every one of us.

I find war abhorrent. But we must never, never turn our back on those who served and subsequently need help.

One of the association founders, Sarah Eaquinto, has become a member of my Post 9/11 Veterans Committee which has two distinct missions: to help other veterans and to promote a better public understanding of veterans as members of the community and the workplace. I would like to ask that all members of the Veterans' Law Student Association, veterans and non-veterans rise. Thank you for your service and for caring.

Class of 2014, you really don't have another minute. You are already gritty but you won't be gritty permanently.

Celebrating OUR GRADUATES



/// Joanne Badua (JD 14)



/// James Kirby (JD 14), Professor Helen Chang

You can go soft.

When you walk from this auditorium you'll have to prove yourself all over again. Make this world a thousand times better.

You don't have to bleed on behalf of your country to make a contribution to it.

But you will have to ache from time to time as choices make you ill.

You will have to wrestle with what is right and what is wrong.

You will have to lose sleep.

You will have to learn how to get swept up in a vision but to say "no" and to survive the scorn of those who simply find it cheap and profitable to say "yes."

Graduates of the class of 2014, you will soon be stewards of the law of the United... States... of America.

Graduates, make history.

Be gritty. ///